

## Worship Service for the Circumcision and Name of Jesus, January 1, 2023

**Readings:** Numbers 6:22–27, Galatians 3:23–29, Luke 2:21

### Sermon Transcript:

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

I don't know about you, but I don't think I've ever seen a shorter Gospel than the one we have today. I think the Alleluia chorus was almost longer than the actual Gospel reading itself. I don't know if that's because this is New Year's Day and we figure people don't have a long attention span today or what it is, but this is truly one of the greatest Gospel readings ever. Short of Christ dying on the cross, this is an amazing statement of the Gospel.

But before we get into that, I want you to look at the front cover of your bulletin. We've got obviously a knife there for the circumcision, and then underneath of it you've got some Hebrew letters. And those Hebrew letters, again, read it in the opposite direction as you do English. And if you read it that way, you have the name Yeshua. So that is the name of Yeshua and that is Jesus' name in Hebrew. So the way we get to Jesus is the New Testament was obviously written in Greek, not Hebrew. So the Greek way of spelling Yeshua, or that name, is Jesus, which we then take into English as Jesus. But the Hebrew name, Yeshua, we take in the Old Testament and we take it into English, and it is Joshua. So Joshua and Jesus are the same name in Hebrew.

Why is this important? Why is this significant? Well, first off, we know from the Old Testament, Joshua is the one who brought the people from the wilderness, through the waters, into the Promised Land. Now, that should sound vaguely familiar. If we think about it, we are in the wilderness of this world and we pass through some waters. What might those be? Baptism. We pass through the waters of baptism and we are brought into the promised land of eternal life where we are declared sons and daughters of God. We are children of God. And so the name Yeshua should, when we think of Jesus, also then drive us all the way back into the Old Testament to think about what Joshua did.

Now, Joshua was the man who came after the lawgiver. Moses gave us the law. Joshua came afterwards and brought us from the law into the promise. And just like we are bound in sin and we need to be brought from the bondage of the law, of the sin that we are held captive to as we read in the Epistle, we need to be brought forth from the law, from bondage, into the promise. And we do that through the waters of our own baptism. And so when you hear the name Jesus, all of the whole, not just Jesus life, death and resurrection, that's great and marvelous and wonderful, but to get a full picture, you need to go all the way back into the Exodus and see all of that and connect the two of those together to see that God was putting this thing all together from the very beginning and gave hints and promises and hopes that would then eventually fully be fulfilled in Christ. The Old Testament helps us understand that as we see it through the lens of Jesus Christ.

So now, we've been talking about baptism. The Epistle lesson is about baptism, that we are baptized into Christ and therefore we are freed from our sin, we are made sons of God. There's neither male nor female, slave nor free, Jew nor Greek. We're all one in Christ. But what in the world does this have to do with Jesus' circumcision? I thought we were talking about... I've been talking about baptism, but the Gospel is about circumcision. Where does that fit into all of this?

Well, just like in our own baptisms, very often, at least in the ancient days, you were baptized and you were christened or you were named on that very same day. So also happened in circumcision. You were circumcised and you were named on that very day. So you can see that connection between circumcision and baptism. We get that most obviously, at least in our culture, in our history through Martin Luther. Martin Luther was born on the 10th of November, and on the 11th of November he was baptized, and the 11th of November was the Feast of Saint Martin. They weren't very creative. It was the Feast of Saint Martin, so they named him Martin. It was very straightforward. And we see this in Jesus. You get these names, these family names that are passed down from generation to generation.

And so Jesus receives a good Hebrew family name of Yeshua, which means God saves. Pretty appropriate, huh? And Yeshua, Joshua, who brought the people from the wilderness into the promised land, his name was also God saves. God saved the people of Israel, bringing them into the promised land. God saves us. God saves through Jesus and brings us from the wilderness of this world and the power of sin into paradise and everlasting life. So you see all those connections. So we have the name, but again, where in the world does circumcision fit into all of this, and why is it such a Gospel message?

Now, you all know what happens in circumcision, right? Okay, so there's a knife and there's some blood. Every time you get cut with a knife, you bleed. It's just a natural process. But think about this, Christ bled for us. When we think about those terms, we very most often think of Christ on the cross, that he bled and died for all of us. But the bleeding, the shedding of blood that Christ did began in His infancy. He began the process of salvation. He began the process of redeeming us, of justifying us way back, even when He was eight days old, when He shed His blood in our place to mark Him as a human, as a child of God, so that He might then live as all children do, and fulfill all human life in all perfection so that every human at any stage of life knows that they too are under the umbrella that God desires all to be saved and gives that gift freely to all people.

We didn't read this in our Epistle lesson, but in another Epistle, in the book of Colossians, chapter two, Paul again talks about circumcision and baptism, and he connects the two of them together so that the circumcision of the Old Testament was sacramental in its nature that the Word of God connected to a physical act done by the rabbi or the priest marks that child as a member of the Jewish community, as a member of the sons of Abraham, children of God. So also more significantly and more profoundly, we are marked in the waters of baptism. Not physically cut away the flesh, but spiritually cut away the flesh of sin. And we are marked as children of Abraham, as sons of God, marked by the promise of the waters of baptism.

See, circumcision, it was under the law, you had to do it as a Jew. As a good Hebrew, you were circumcised. But it was a marking, it was an act of promise and hope. You were circumcised in the hope of salvation, in the hope of the promise, because Abraham came before Moses, the promise came first. When God spoke to Abraham, He said, "I will bless you, and through your offspring, all nations will be blessed, and your descendants will be as numerous as the skies in the heaven or the sands in the sea." And that is done. It was done in circumcision in the Old Testament as a hope of that promise being fulfilled, that all nations would be blessed and it is fulfilled in Christ where all nations are blessed. And we receive that fullness of the sons of God.

And then look, even in the Old Testament, even in Numbers, at the very beginning when God spoke to Moses, He told him to tell Aaron, say this to the people and hopefully this sounds a little familiar to you. "The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord lift up His

countenance upon you and give you peace." But what does He say after that? He says, "So shall they put My name upon the people of Israel." That blessing is connected to circumcision, but now in the New Testament, it is connected to our baptisms.

We receive that Aaronic blessing. "The Lord bless you and keep you." How does He do that? By adopting you in the waters of baptism as His child and washing away your sin. "The Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you." How can the holy and perfect and righteous God be gracious to you, a sinner? Because you have been washed in the waters of baptism and you are adopted as His children. "The Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace." How in the world can God look upon me as the holy and righteous God and I still be at peace at the end of it? I should be writhing in fear and trembling before the almighty presence of God, that He is watching me. And yet I am not, I'm at peace. Why? Because I have been marked in baptism and I am His child.

So when we hear that blessing at the end of each service, it is a reminder that we have been adopted in Christ in our baptisms, the fulfillment and the fullness of our circumcision, of the mark of circumcision in the Old Testament being fully realized in baptism, the promise being fulfilled. All nations will be blessed through the baptism that gives us the blood of Christ, which started in His circumcision. That his descendants will be as numerous as the stars because we are grafted into the family in our baptisms. The blood covers us and washes us, which began in His circumcision and continues to His death and is given to us in our baptisms. This is why we speak of Joshua, Yeshua, God saves, through the shedding of the blood of Christ for us.

What a blessing it is to be a part of the family of God, to stand in the confidence and the certainty that His name is upon us. Come what may this year, we know this, we are sons of God and heirs to the promise of paradise. And that paradise is already ours. We get a foretaste of it. We get the body and blood. We get the Word given to us freely, but it's just a taste. And what a glorious day it will be when He comes in His glory and His countenance shines upon us, and we are at peace.

May His grace, mercy, and peace be and abide with you throughout this year and for all eternity unto life everlasting. Amen.